

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
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P R 210926Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6576
INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
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AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

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EO 11652: N/A
TAGS: ASEAN OCON
SUBJECT: ELEVENTH ASEAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

REF: A) BANGKOK 17233 B) BANGKOK 17343

1. SUMMARY: THE 11TH MEETING OF ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS (HELD IN PATTAYA 14-16 JUNE) WAS CHARACTERIZED BY MOST PARTICIPANTS AND OBSERVERS AS UNEVENTFUL. THE ONLY EXCITEMENT WAS GENERATED BY THE VIETNAMESE PROPOSAL IN NEW YORK FOR A ZONE OF PEACE AND THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE CORRIDOR DISCUSSION IN ANTICIPATION OF A ONE-DAY SESSION WITH JAPANESE FOREIGN MINISTER SONODA FOLLOWING THE ASEAN MINISTERIAL (SEPTTEL). THE THREE DAY ASEAN MEETING FOCUSSED ON REVIEWING THE WORK OF THE VARIOUS ASEAN COMMITTEES OVER THE PAST YEAR AND REACHING A COMMON POSITION FOR DIALOGUES WITH THE US, JAPAN AND EEC. THE MINISTERS CALLED FOR GREATER EFFORTS TO SOLVE THE INDOCHINA REFUGEE PROBLEM AND EXPRESSED GRAVE CONCERN OVER THE POLITICAL SITUATION VIS-A-VIS VIETNAM, KAMPUCHEA AND THE PRC. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS MOVED THROUGH THEIR AGENDA ON SCHEDULE. DATUK ALI BIN ABDULLAH, MALAYSIA, WAS CONFIRMED AS THE NEW SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ASEAN SECRETARIAT FOR A PERIOD OF TWO YEARS. INDONESIA WILL TAKE OVER CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE ASEAN STANDING COMMITTEE FOR THE COMING YEAR REPLACING THAILAND.

3. AGREEMENT WAS REACHED ON THE DATES, LEVEL OF REPRESENTATION AND AGENDA FOR THE FORTHCOMING US-ASEAN DIALOGUE IN WASHINGTON AS REPORTED IN REF B. INDONESIAN, MALAYSIAN AND THAI DELEGATIONS EXPRESSED ANXIETY THAT THE MINISTERIAL MEETING IN WASHINGTON MIGHT HAVE FEW TANGIBLE RESULTS. THESE VAGUE SENTIMENTS HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED BEFORE. THAI RESERVATIONS, RAISED IN PATTAYA, CONCERNING THE US-ASEAN DIALOGUE HAVE BEEN EXPLAINED TO EMBASSY BY AN MFA OFFICIAL IN TERMS WHICH DIFFER FROM PRESS REPORTS. THE RTG UNDERSTANDS AND APPRECIATES US EFFORTS TO PUBLICIZE WASHINGTON MEETING WITH THE US BUSINESS SECTOR, CONGRESS AND THE PUBLIC. THEY SEE THIS A A BENEFIT INTERNATIONALLY AND FOR THE ASEAN REGION. HOWEVER, THEY ARE APPREHENSIVE FROM STANDPOINT OF THAI DOMESTIC PUBLIC RELATIONS AND, TO SOME EXTENT, TO THEIR GEOGRAPHIC POSITION RELATIVE TO INDOCHINA. THE THAI ARE SENSITIVE TO CRITICISM FROM THE PUBLIC AND LOCAL PRESS IF THEY RETURN FROM A HIGHLY PUBLICIZED MINISTERIAL MEETING WITH LITTLE OR NOTHING TO SHOW FOR THE EFFORT. FOR THIS REASON THEY ARE ANXIOUS THAT EMPHASIS BE PLACED ON DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN THE WASHINGTON AGENDA AND HOPE THAT SERIOUS DISCUSSION OF THIS TOPIC WILL RESULT IN A REASONABLE ECONOMIC COMMITMENT TOWARD ASEAN FROM THE US SIDE. THE THAI HAD NO QUARREL WITH THE ILLUSTRATIVE AGENDA PROPOSED BY THE US BUT SUPPORTED A REARRANGEMENT OF TOPICS AIMED AT UNDERLINING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THE MFA OFFICER HOPED THIS EMPHASIS COULD BE WORKED OUT SATISFACTORILY DURING THE US-ASEAN MEETING ON DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN MANILA JULY

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7-8. HE ADDED THAT A CONSENSUS HAD BEEN REACHED IN PATTAYA REGARDING THE US DIALOGUE AND THAT DIFFERENCES OF VIEW TOWARD THE WASHINGTON TALKS WERE LARGELY RECONCILED. THE RTG WAS NOW CONCENTRATING ON PREPARATIONS FOR THE MANILA MEETING.

4. CONSIDERABLE UNEASINESS WAS VOICED BY THE MINISERS OVER CURRENT TENSIONS IN INDOCHINA, SPECIFICALLY BETWEEN VIETNAM, KAMPUCHEA, AND THE PRC. THESE WERE GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE A THREAT TO THE STABILITY OF ASEAN WITH ULTIMATE REPERCUSSIONS ALSO STEMMING FROM SINO-SOVIET RIVALRIES UNLESS A PEACEFUL SOLUTION COULD BE REACHED. THE UNEASY RELATIONS BETWEEN BURMA AND BANGLADESH WAS ALSO VIEW WITH CONCERN.

5. THE MINISTERS DISCUSSED THE CONTINUING FLOW OF INDOCHINA REFUGEES AND URGED GREATER EFFORTS ON THE PART OF THE UNHCR AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO QUICKLY RESETTLE THE REFUGEES TO LESSEN THE BURDEN ON THE ASEAN COUNTRIES. A PROPOSAL WAS DISCUSSED FOR INCLUDING THE BURMESE REFUGEES IN BANGLADESH UNDER THIS PLEA BUT WAS DROPPED IN FAVOR OF CONFINING THE COMMUNIQUE TO THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEE PROBLEM. ASEAN IS PROPOSING AN ITEM ON REFUGEES FOR THE US-ASEAN TALKS IN AUGUST.

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6. THE FOREIGN MINISTERS DID NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT TIME TO CONSIDER DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE ECONOMIC MINISTERS ON ECONOMIC COOPERATION MATTERS TEN DAYS EARLIER IN JAKARTA. AS A CONSEQUENCE, THE FOREIGN MINISTERS MERELY NOTED THE ECONOMIC MINISTERS' DECISION TO ADD 755 ITEMS UNDER THE ASEAN PREFERENTIAL TRADE ARRANGEMENTS. TIME DID NOT PERMIT IRONING OUT DIFFERENCES ON THE ASEAN INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS. AGAIN, THE FOREIGN MINISTERS INDICATED THE BASIC AGREEMENT ON ASEAN INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS AND THE SUPPLEMENTARY AGREEMENT FOR THE INDONESIAN AND MALAYSIAN UREA PROJECTS WOULD BE SIGNED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTERS AT A LATER DATE.

7. THE MINISTERS VIEWED WITH CONCERN THE LACK OF PROGRESS IN NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE INTEGRATED PROGRAM OF COMMODITIES, COMMON FUND, MTN, AND THE CONTINUING TREND TOWARD PROTECTIONISM IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE. THE MINISTERS ACKNOWLEDGED, HOWEVER, THE COOPERATION OF THE US AND EEC IN PROMOTING COMMON INTERESTS AND THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF ASEAN AS A VIABLE REGIONAL GROUPING OF DEVELOPING NATIONS.

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8. ASEAN'S COMMITMENT TO THE ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA WAS REAFFIRMED. HOWEVER, HANOI SURPRISED THE CONFERENCE WITH THEIR NEW YORK RELEASE OF A FOUR POINT DEFINITION OF THE ZONE OF PEACE. THIS PROPOSAL CAME TOO LATE FOR CONSIDERATION AT THE MEETING, BUT THE MINISTERS, DURING THE FINAL PRESS CONFERENCE, REACTED CAUTIOUSLY. MOST CONSIDERED THE PROPOSAL AN ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENT EVEN THOUGH THE EXPRESSION "GENUINE INDEPENDENCE" SEEMED AMBIGUOUS. FOREIGN MINISTER ROMULO NOTED THAT HANOI HAD NOT ATTACKED ASEAN DURING THE PAST YEAR AND NO LONGER REFERRED TO ASEAN AS A SEATO. THIS WAS A WELCOME SIGN. ASEAN PLANS TO TAKE UP THE HANOI PROPOSAL AT A FUTURE MEETING AND DECIDE HOW BEST TO RESPOND.

9. WHILE NOTHING EXTRAORDINARY OCCURRED AT THE 11TH CONFERENCE, THE FOREIGN MINISTERS CONVEYED A SENSE OF CONFIDENCE AND THERE WAS A GENERAL FEELING AMONG DELEGATES THAT THE GROUP HAD MOVED AHEAD, PARTICULARLY IN ESTABLISHING ASEAN'S IDENTITY AND IN INCREASING THE DEVELOPED WORLD'S AWARENESS OF ASEAN AND ITS INTEREST IN A CONTINUING DIALOGUE.

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